

## Modern Hanseatic Trends in the Baltic Region

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# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: HISTORY

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## MODERN HANSEATIC TRENDS IN THE BALTIC REGION

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*A critical analysis of the Hanseatic traditions may produce consequential methodological material for the study of the XXI-century Baltic regionalisation. Current trends in the development of the Baltic region, whose academic analysis is impossible without considering earlier cases of successful interactions between the peoples of the Baltic Sea region, necessitate political, economic, and historical research on the strengths and weaknesses of the Hanseatic League. Unfortunately, in the XXI century, the Baltic Sea region turned into a stage for geopolitical controversies. This took a toll on the efficiency of cooperation between the cities of Russia's North-West and their Baltic counterparts. Therefore, it is important to seize opportunities provided by the information society and focus on innovative areas of regional cooperation. An interesting example of such cooperation is a partnership of Baltic universities aimed to draw up an international agenda for sustainable regional development is. The Baltic cities are involved in various forms of cross-border cooperation, providing opportunities for interstate relations and contribute to drawing cross-border cooperation roadmaps and developing civil society networks. It can be concluded, that the history of the Hanseatic League and its current incarnation — the New Hansa — testify to the fact that productive economic, cultural, and other relations can be established between states but also between cities and universities, thus contributing to closer economic, political and cultural ties between the peoples of the Baltic region.*

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## Introduction

In the first quarter of XXI century regionalization has been facilitating the formation of multi-tier and diversified rapprochement between states and peoples in terms of their international cooperation and membership in international organisations. “The recent geopolitical conflicts in Europe and adjacent regions have proved meaningfulness of such notions as border, territory, national identity and regionalism in the contemporary network-based and ever-shifting world” [13]. However, with ever increasing frequency, scholarly disputes are raging about the role of the state and its historical destiny. According to R. Kh. Simonyan, “state’s role is declining, which is quite evident and ascertained by each and every historian. It is undoubtedly an up-and-coming process. Cities are becoming ponderous political units. We witness the restoration of the city as a self-sustained subject in international relations. There are numerous examples of this — Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, New-York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, London, Moscow, St. Petersburg, etc. These cities are setting globalization standards” [17, P. 27]. In this context, the Baltic region, the emergence whereof on the political and economic world map prompted by the geopolitical turmoil of the 1990-s, is a region with an immense potential for new forms of cross-border cooperation and multicultural cooperation.

## The Hanseatic League historical experience

It is important to emphasize that even in earlier epochs the peoples, who dwelled along the Baltic seashore demonstrated effective economic and cultural integration, whereby the Hanseatic League was the linchpin. That is exactly why in XXI century historical experience of the Hanseatic League is studied by politicians, economists and historians. The identification of modern trends in the Baltic region cannot be done without the analysis of successful cooperation models from the past.

In the Middle Ages, free towns of Europe played a pivotal role, which, from viewpoint of the Russian scholar P. A. Kropotkin, was important for the development of Renaissance, “economic liberty, the “simple-to-complex” business pattern, production and in-city changes managed by craft guilds, engagement of entire cities in international trade, procurement of principal commodities and their distribution among citizens at production cost... During the first two centuries of their self-sustained existence, owing to their entrepreneurial spirit free medieval cities became welfare ‘centres’ for their population, being the concentration of wealth, high development and culture never seen before” [10, P. 294]. This kind of urban life was typical not only of Italian cities-republics but also of the Baltic cities, which had managed to set up the largest merchant association (the Hanseatic League). That engendered a new urban social layer — the bourgeoisie. In the mid-XIV century,

the North-Germanic merchantry initiated the establishment of “merchant Hanse”, which laid the foundation for the “Hanse of cities” (Lubeck, Bremen, Hamburg, Stralsund, etc.), later acquiring the name “German Hanse”.

At that time, the Baltic Sea was a vital trade artery. However, on their own, merchant guilds were not able to provide safe and efficient international commercial collaboration. Hence, the foundation of the Hanseatic League tangibly modified economic situation in North Europe. Apart from London, the Hansa League had its commercial missions in Bergen and Bruges, Pskov and Venice, Novgorod and Stockholm. German merchants were the only foreigners to keep their own commercial residence in Venice; cities from the North of Italy allowed them to navigate freely across the Mediterranean. As many historians note, trade fairs required diversity, so merchants from Germany went to Dublin and Oslo, Frankfurt and Prague, Amsterdam and Narva, Warsaw and Vitebsk, “there everything that many families had been saving up for months and denying themselves every necessary, was purchased. Rows of shopping stalls burst with plenty of Oriental luxury, and sophisticated and exotic household items. Flemish tapestries were sold along with English wool, Aquitanian leather with Russian honey, Cyprian copper utensils with Lithuanian amber, Icelandic herring with French cheese, and Venetian glass with Baghdadi swords” [3].

To a large extent, the economic synergy of the Hanseatic League was determined by political and economic traits of power relations in Europe of that time. The Hanseatic cities (170 cities maximum) represented quite a rare phenomenon in Europe’s political and economic life, i. e. they had not been either under the state’s or church reign. In fact, the cities were self-governing commercial republics, where power was given to their population (the bourgeoisie). City authorities had to comply with the economic rules guiding their partnership relation. Therefore, international cooperation was based on common interests by Northern European merchant cities. Apart from the economic constituent, a vivid multicultural factor is noteworthy — common language. Germanic languages borrowed some Italian and Slavic roots and vice versa. Another critical advantage of the Hanseatic League as a comprehensive defence system is its own troops and fleet. It allowed the League to protect the cities’ commercial interests from independent seigniors and even wage wars against states. The Hanseatic League, which existed till the middle of XVII century (the last congress was held in 1669), was a strong political force in the Baltic Sea. However, as A. Stenzel notes, Hanse’s performance was not bereft of quite significant flaws, as “caused by the privileges, which Hanse had been enjoying, the Scandinavian and Russian trade dried out, whereas the English merchantry fell by the wayside — Hanse held sway from the Neva to the Netherlands over sea and trade” [20, p. 492]. One has to agree with the critical take on the role of the Hanseatic League given by the prominent researcher of the medieval Europe M. P. Lesnikov, who remarked that “persistent and unscrupulous, albeit not always adroit Hanseatic policy, its struggle for all possible privileges and preferences had enabled the League to wind round all countries having access to the Baltic and North



Seas with their commercial network, exploiting them and nudging out their aboriginal less developed and entrepreneurial rival or counterparts to the side lines” [11, p. 71].

Therefore, the Hanseatic League’s performance was determined by the interests of the German bourgeoisie, who used various methods, strengthening their monopoly across the Baltics.

Consequently, many Russian cities, first and foremost, Novgorod the Great and Pskov, strived to defend their trade interests. A retrospective analysis of relations between Russia and the Hanseatic League in XIII—XVII centuries shows that the situation in free trade between the two subjects of economic relations was not as idyllic as it is often described. One can even claim that most systemic problems, which mar current relations between Russia and Western Europe, emerged already at that period and were complicating both political and economic relations between Hansa and Russia [12].

Unfortunately, both internal (ever intensifying economic contradictions among the Union’s members) and external (primary commercial transactions shift to the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans) reasons gradually led to a downfall of the Hanseatic League. However, historical implications of this international non-governmental union are still felt nowadays: “The League gave incentives to the growth of agriculture, textile and the mining industry, and, what is more important, it widened communication, nourished its own entrepreneurial culture, stimulated soaring urbanization of Europe, favoured science and enlightenment” [17, p. 27]. That is why, the experience of the Hanseatic League can be used in the implementation of international projects in the Baltic Sea region, where cities are still playing a pivotal role in political and economic evolution.

### **The new tendencies in interregional relations in the Baltic Sea region**

Regrettably, the Baltic Sea region is plagued by geopolitical controversies, which took their toll on the efficiency of cooperation between Russia’s north-west cities and their regional counterparts. According to D. Voynov, “the Kaliningrad enclave on the territory of the expanding European Union is reminiscent of a case, which happened more than six centuries ago when the Hansa League and the Russian State broke off their economically lucrative relations. At present, the European Union does not want to make any concessions and Russia has to take counter measures. The system of double standards has already sprouted though being an anachronism of the Cold War and leading to weakening prospects” [3]. In this regard, it would be difficult to disagree with the expert estimation that the “economic and geographic potential (EGP) of the Kaliningrad region, located closely to the vast European market, is underdeveloped because of high trade barriers and the region’s remoteness from mainland Russia” [5, p. 123]. These adverse trends of the recent years in the EU-Russia relations can and should be halted since they have an extremely detrimental effect on both parties.



In this context, it is advisable to pay attention to recent tendencies in the interregional relations, which are often referred to as *city diplomacy*. City diplomacy implies a “direct cooperation between cities and other actors of international affairs, expansion of their impact and further collaboration with partners in search and use of resources for their growth and cooperation far beyond the national territory” [18, p. 377]. A major part of the Baltic region’s population lives in small and medium-size cities or rural areas in close proximity to cities.

The 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hanseatic League was a big event celebrated in Zwolle, the Netherlands, in 1980. In a way, this event led to the setting up of an organisation called “The Hanseatic League of the Modern Time” or “the New Hansa”. This organisation aims at the development of culture and tourism. Hence, there are numerous annual festivals, the “Hanseatic Days”, exhibitions, fairs and other events organized in the New Hansa cities. It is noteworthy that both the host and guest cities are strongly determined to revive the spirit of Hansa, the spirit of friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect. However, not only cultural, but also economic issues are discussed at such events. In 2009, one of Hansa festivals was held in Novgorod.

The “Hanseatic League of the Modern Time” unites 187 cities from 16 European countries, including 14 Russian cities: Belozersk, Novgorod the Great, Ustyug the Great, Vologda, Ivangorod, Kaliningrad, Kingisepp, Porkhov, Pskov, Smolensk, Tver, Tikhvin, Torzhok and Totma” [4]. According to T. M. Kochegarova and R. H. Simonyan, “the Russian transit routes have passed through the Baltic Sea region for several thousand years. The only thing that has changed over time is the transported product: at the beginning it was honey, wax, salt; today these are containers. Another resource that has always been there is the geographic location of the region. And the more this resource is exploited, the richer the region becomes” [12].

The conference of the Hanseatic cities’ mayors in Tallinn (formerly known as the Hanseatic Revel) is a vivid example of city diplomacy focusing on strengthening the integrational potential of the Baltic Sea region and using it to the full. The population of the region is approximately 50 million people, who are mainly well-educated people with a proactive aptitude to develop a knowledge-based economy. However, the implementation of this task is still full of obstacles predetermined by historical and political reasons. Many research papers argue that even inside the Baltic countries, there is a clear social and economic division between ethnic communities. While comparing Tallinn to Riga “more often than not do the Estonians stand apart from the Russian-speaking minority than the Latvians. The Estonians tend to dominate in the social hierarchy, giving up lower grades to other minorities. This deepens social-economic segregation in Tallinn. In other words, the ethnic and social-economic segregation models cross each other ever more frequently” [15]. These problems cannot be done away with overnight. It is but civil society and, especially, the New Hansa that could facilitate peoples’ rapprochement.



### **Development of university hubs as a way towards innovative cross-boundary mobility and cooperation**

The Baltic region provides numerous opportunities for the development of innovative forms of regional cooperation. There are many science and education centres in the region, employing highly qualified research and teaching staff. This fact is vital for the development of a knowledge-based economy in the context of the overall aspiration of the region towards building an information society. There are universities in almost all the Baltic cities; they are 'think-tanks' facilitating the development of society and intellectual capital. The German politician K. Schlee, noted in his speech at the XIII parliamentary forum of the southern zone of the Baltic Sea, "likewise the Hanseatic League, the Baltic sea has proved to be a unifying, rather than a divisive element. We all are interested in strengthening the Baltic Sea region, we all consider ourselves neighbours. But if at present the education factor is a major cause of innovations, the Baltic region is tipped for scoring a success in the global competition" [19, p. 38—39].

The Baltic University Programme is noteworthy in this regard; it is built on the network principle and unites 200 universities from 14 Baltic countries. Launched in 1991, the Baltic University Programme is coordinated by the Secretariat in Uppsala University (Sweden). There are also national centres of the Baltic University Programme in each country. It helps to concentrate efforts on advancing innovative projects. When determining the borders of the Baltic region, the founders of this programme decided to delineate the region according to the borders of the Baltic Sea catchment area. Therefore, alongside with the coastal countries (Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia) Belorussia, Ukraine, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Norway take part in the Programme [8].

One of the objectives of the Programme is to develop international cooperation in education, environmental protection and sustainable development of the Baltic region. However, some experts argue that there is not enough communication between environmental organisations, that is why the entire multi-tier system needs an overhaul, so as to "find a new governance form, which would combine traditional state governance with simultaneous involvement of numerous non-governmental subjects" [7, p. 95]. In this sense, it would be essential to better involve college and university students can develop their skills within the Baltic University" Programme having considerable outreach by employing forms of distant education, video conferencing instantaneously unifying audience of thousands from dozens of the participating universities from all countries in this part of Europe" [8].

Consequently, the synergy of universities in the Baltic Sea region paves the way for progression of the sustainable development international policy in this region. "Extending rights and opportunities to individuals on making rational decisions and construction of the society resting on the sustainable development principles is a pre-condition for the stability of the region. A well-



balanced sustainable development policy should be carried out across all levels, affording wide opportunities for critical reasoning, creativity and innovations. Even today the Baltic Sea region is being regarded as one of the leading regions in the world when it comes to eco-innovations, cutting-edge technologies and services output. Currently, the challenge is to make eco-innovations more wide-spread and accessible [17].

### The Baltic Sea city diplomacy evolution traits

In the modern urbanized world, it is critically important for city residents and municipal authorities to be engaged in sustainability maintenance of their cities. Many Baltic cities, including St. Petersburg, participate in the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG 2004). It has put finishing touches to the merger of the world largest organisations, amalgamating local authorities — the United Towns Organisation (UTO), and the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), as well as the major cities association “Metropolis” [4].

Driven by globalization and regionalization, the Baltic cities are getting ever more actively involved in work of non-governmental bodies of the Baltic Sea countries. For instance, the Association for Subregional Cooperation of the Baltic Sea Nations (ASCBSN) was established at the conference in Stavanger (Norway) in 1993. The work of the Association is primarily aimed at enhancing interregional cooperation of the Baltic countries. 162 regions from 10 countries are parties to the Association: Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden and Estonia. Under its statute, the ASCBSN takes on the role of a contact point for its members and acts as an intermediary in addressing the region’s development issues. The organisation provides financial backing for the implementation of regional projects. Another important objective of the Association is to facilitate information exchange between its participants and other organisations in the region. The ASCBSN shares best practices through participation in different projects. The Association maintains contacts with numerous European bodies and organisations, including the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) [14].

The Baltic Palette Project (1999—2000) is an impressive example of successful projects; it was aimed the development of spatial planning, transport networks, information society, tourism and water quality management. Stockholm-Mälaren (Sweden), the Uusimaa and South-Western Finland regions (Finland), the Riga district (Latvia), Tallinn and Harju maakond (Estonia), St. Petersburg and Leningrad region (Russia) were engaged in the project. One of the important outcomes of the project was a package of documents, an action plan for the period up to 2020. Partner countries adopted a Joint Declaration on Cooperation [6, p. 89].

The Baltic cities regional cross-boundary cooperation projects evolved into a new format — twin cities cooperation. For the first time, the twin cities notion was used in XX century in the USA, describing two cities located opposite each other on the Mississippi. Since then, the two cities have been developing as complementary economic complexes — Minneapolis and





St. Paul. In the Baltic Sea region, the concept of twin cities was introduced in the late 1980s, when cross-border cooperation between the two cities of Finland and Sweden, Tornio and Haparanda, commenced. Further on, many other Baltic cities joined this project, along with twin-cities in Central and Eastern Europe.

According to the Russian researchers A. G. Anishchenko and A. A. Sergunin, this trend is “not only a new tendency in cross-boundary cooperation, but also one of the manifestations of *para-diplomacy*, i. e. involvement of the non-traditional (non-state) actors — cities, intra-state regions, separate corporations, entities and non-governmental organisations in world politics (“public diplomacy”)” [1]. Nowadays, the following criteria are used to define twin cities, participating in international cooperation:

- location at the state boundary, i. e. they are to be border towns;
- common historical past, when they were an entire whole or, conversely, stood in opposition to each other. For instance, after the end of the World War II Finland’s town of Enso was divided into two parts — Imatra (Finland) and Svetogorsk (Russia). Narva and Ivangorod, in their turn, emerged as a Danish (later Swedish) and Russian outposts respectively in the Baltics, opposing each other;
- cooperation;
- location on the same river, which has historically served as a natural geographic border between them. For this reason, such cities are often called “bridge cities”, symbolising a linchpin between different countries and peoples;
- availability of relevant international agreements [1].

In 2006, the twin cities project was formally recognised through the City Twins Association. Pursuant to the CTA Statute, it aims at encouragement of interaction between twin cities in such areas as municipal governance and civil society, local industry, creation of a common job market, collaborative work in social welfare and public healthcare systems, raising efficiency of cross-border points (where appropriate), implementation of cultural and educational projects, and defending twin cities’ interests at the national and international level [2].

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), an international non-governmental organisation based on the conference of the Baltic cities representatives in Gdansk (1991) is of particular interest. The UBC has more than 100 cities from 10 Baltic Sea countries. The aim of the organisation is to facilitate cooperation between them at the local level, promote sharing best practices and contribution to democratic, social-economic and environmental-friendly development of the Baltic Sea region. The UBC general conference is held biennially. The UBC Executive Committee consists of 10 cities, with each of them representing a certain country in the Baltic region. The UBC works through sectoral commissions on culture, environment protection, social welfare issues, telecommunications, transport, sports, tourism, and business collaboration [9]. As Per Bødker Andersen, the UBC President, commented on the UBC’s twentieth anniversary, “From a region divided for 45 years by the iron curtain, it has transformed into an area of considerable cooperation and growth” [9].

## Summary

Concluding the review of the role of the Baltic cities in international relations, it is necessary to remark that firstly, in the contemporary context, cities have started to set the pace to other actors of global international cooperation alongside with states. This tendency was bolstered by globalization and informatization, which opened cross-border cooperation to urban population, especially, in border areas. Secondly, critical analysis of the historical experience of the Hanseatic League may be useful for the identification of new incentives for economic integration in the Baltic Sea region. Thirdly, the Baltic cities are engaged in various forms of cross-border cooperation, hence making a considerable contribution to international cooperation on the state level. Their active international position facilitates further development of cross-border cooperation and more active interactions within civil society.

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